It was called Zulu. A cheap-ass, sun-faded, rusted-over excuse of an amusement park stuck just outside a notorious ghetto right off the freeway.

No shit. Zulu.

I kid you not; the motif was *jungle adventure*. Fiberglass lions and gorillas lurching about. Man-sized tribal masks announcing the park rules. Plastic trees and a couple of pock-marked rubber crocodiles floating in the unnatural electric blue water of a concrete pool. Are you ready for the mascot? Yes, you got it - a saucer-eyed, cartoon pygmy with a bone through its nose and hair like it just stuck its dick in an electrical outlet. Cutouts of Zinger-Zu in front of every ride telling kids how tall they had to be....

So egregious, it soared right over "unacceptably offensive" and landed square on "ironically acceptable kitsch." And it was in Tarrant County, Texas, so that helped.

Virgil had been born into the ghetto that sprawled behind the zig-zag shadows of Zulu's dilapidated roller coasters. As a very young child, that park represented the promise of magic, adventure and mystery. Of course, money being money, he'd never been allowed to visit during those innocent years; and you grew up fast in the ghetto, so by the time Virgil did get to pass through the wrought iron gates for a sample of jungle paradise, he was already too old to believe in voodoo or hippopotamuses. No, as a pre-teen and teenager, he went to Zulu exclusively to buy weight and sell dime-bags to suburbanites from Fort Worth.

He'd never had the chance or, later, the inclination to ride a single ride.

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Older now, Virgil had lived 35 years, married twice, and had four kids. He stood six foot two inches, still trim at two hundred pounds. He had a good job in the city; a respectable house in the suburbs. His current girlfriend was able to trick him into church on Sunday mornings because she knew how to handle him on Saturday nights. If he wasn't careful, she'd become #3.

He was driving down the freeway with his youngest son, Wayne, and the child made a curious noise when they passed the almost illegibly weathered sign for "Zulu! Live the Adventure!"

"What?" Virgil asked his boy.

"Zulu...," the child said. "Zoo?"

"Nah." Virgil laughed. "But good guess. Hey, you know...."

Virgil checked the mirrors and exited the freeway. "You want to live the adventure, little man?"

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Wayne's mother was crazy. Not quite rising to the level of court mandated institutionalization, but Virgil figured that was only one more bizarre road-rage incident away. Nevertheless, for all her batshit inclinations, she was very smart. Once she'd told Virgil that her IQ had been tested at the genius level. And he believed her. But, really, what did it matter if you could mentally convert ounces to grams or recite poetry from memory if you couldn't buy a dress without getting into a vicious fight with the saleslady, knocking over the window display, and getting chased out of the mall by a team of rent-a-cops?

Virgil was well rid of that situation; but he enjoyed spending time with their child. The boy seemed to have acquired his mother's intelligence, with none of the insanity. Virgil supposed it was bad form to pick favorites, but of all his children, Wayne was the only one he actively troubled himself to spend time with. All the others were dropped off by mandate; but Virgil would go out of his way to pick up Wayne and gladly hold on to him an extra couple of hours or even an entirely unscheduled day when the situation called for it.

Wayne was Virgil's little man. He was a calm, thoughtful, observant and sharp child. His soft, brown eyes took in everything, then his brow would furrow, or his smile would widen depending on the situation, and then he'd react in a delightfully mature and appropriate manner. It gave Virgil a sense of peace and rightness, walking hand in hand with his little man.

Just as they did passing through the gates of the Zulu amusement park together; Virgil having purchased two tickets to spend some time reliving his past and sharing the experience with his son.

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"I used to come here pretty much every night when I was a teen," Virgil told Wayne. They were strolling down the market street, past the arcade, souvenir shops, and overpriced food stands. All the buildings needed paint and repair - the wood beam

facades were chipped and rutted, sporting plenty of graffiti, and the roofs that were supposed to be thatched with palm-leaves had large bare sections of corrugated metal shining through. "It hasn't changed much," Virgil said, sadly.

As they continued through the park, Virgil would offer to take Wayne on some of the rides - Voom Voom Vulture! Zambizi Zinger! Python Plunge! - but the boy judiciously shook his head to the negative. It wasn't fear, just common sense. Everything looked so rickety and sketchy; even if the cabs didn't fall off their disintegrating rails, it certainly didn't look like much fun to be jerked around in those rusty metal buckets for three minutes of bad track.

"How about go-karts?" Virgil suggested. Wayne considered this for a moment and then smiled.

"Okay," he agreed. "Go-karts sound good."

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